

[William S. Knight]

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FOLK STUFF - RANGE LORE 10/19/37

Gauthier. Sheldon F.

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William S. Knight, 59, living at 107 Lexington St, Forth Worth, Texas, was born July 5th, 1876, on a ranch, situated in Bell County, Texas.

When old enough to sit on a horse, Knight was taught to ride. At the age of six he began work assisting in the care of the cattle. He continued to work on the range until 1896, then went to Mississippi and engaged in levee construction which work he followed till ten years ago at which time he retired.

Knight married Dorothy Mae Moore in 1897. There were seven children born to the couple.

His story of range life follows:

"I was born in Bell County, Texas, on a cow ranch 59 years ago. My father, W.S. Knight, was the owner of the ranch and run 15 thousand cattle. His brand was 'W K'. It was an open range and contained a good many breaks, which made it hard work and riding difficult at some points.

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"I was taught to ride when I was a stripling, just old enough to straddle a hoss. Therefore, I was a fair rider when I was six years old and was put to work. There were tow reasons for putting me to work at that age. One was because I enjoyed riding and insisted on working, the other reason hands were scarce. The counrty was sparsely settled then.

"My first duty was acting as Bull nurse. There were a great many bog holes scatteres over the range and quite often a critter would get bogged down. The riders were always on the [?] watch for bogged critters. If a critter was down for a good spell, say a couple days and one day if a bad spell of weather was, it would be in a tolerable weak consition, numbed and unable to stand. C12 - Texas 2 Then it was my [time?] for action and my job as bull nurse was called for. The location of the critter would be reported to me and then I would ride to it, taking to it a sack of prickly pears, with the stickers burned off, and feed the critter, also give it water.

"The prickly pear, is very nourishing and was handy feed, easy to obtain in that section of the country. The pear was always used to keep the critter's tape worm from yelling too loud, until the animal could regain it's walking habit and feed it self. During a long wet spell of weather I was kept busy jiggling from one point to another bull nursing. Often I had a 20 mile drag to a bogged critter and when I had time to spare I would look for animals that were down.

"What was done to extract a critter from a bog was simple operation. We just throwed a loop around the critter's horns and with the [riata?] fastened to the nub of the saddle the hoss did the rest. The hoss sometimes would have a hard pull to drag the animal out and at times it required two hosses.

"I have often started out early in the morning, with a chunk of jerk in my saddle bag and be out all day bull nursing. Jerk is quite well known here in the Southwest, but still a lot of folks dosen't know what it is, so it is best that I explain about it before I go on. It is beef that has been cut into strips and hung on some object in the open till it is completely dried.

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The meat then is hard and will keep without getting [?]. It can be eaten raw or cooked. 3 When cooked it will soften and gnaw easily. To eat it without cooking one needs a good set of teeth. The best way to handle it is to wittle ot off with a knife. When I was out I never stoped to cook, but whould whittle off a few pieces and gnaw on it to keep my tape worm satisfied.

“As I became older I gradually took on more of the work until at the age of fifteen I was a full hand doing everything that was required of a cowhand.

““Among the, he-man, jobs was night riding. During sociable weather, when the stars and moon was shining and the temperature was mild, it was pleasant work, but when the night was darker than two black cats, with a cold rain a-falling driven by a high wind, and a-top of that heavenly cannon-ball a rolling and sky fire flshing, the stoker in hell held a good job compared with that of a night rider on a cattle range.

“Now I have worked during many of those hell-bent nights. We always worked in [pairs?] and kept circling the herd watching for trouble. A rider had to be careful about making a noise, even striking a match, in the night, [so Id?] start a stampede. The startling of a herd could be caused by some animal suddenly running into it. Even such a vermin as a wiffy cat could frighten a herd and there were plenty of those. A bad storm with sky fire and thunder, if it was striking close, and hail always started the cattle moving. When the music of the tramping hoofs and clashing horns began on a cold and raining night, the silver lining of the cowhand's cloud sure disappeared. So 4 you see, the night rider had to keep him mind on his knitting and knit fast.

“I recall one night when Bogger Red, of rodeo fame, now deceased, and I were paired. The air was sultry and my mount was toasting it's head and his muscels were quivering. That was a sure sign a spell of mean weather was going to hit. Most cattle hosses could scent impending trouble befor we rawhides and we always took our knowledge from the

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action of the animal. My personal mount was good in that respect, and I was on him that night. I chined to Bogger Red;

"According to the way my hoss is acting we are in for a bad spell of weather."

"Mine is showing signs too", he answered, "and the way the air smells it is going to be a good one. I can hear the critters moving now".

"The herd had bedded down, but were getting up, which showed that they were expecting trouble and were getting ready to give some. Booger had just finished chining with me when the first flask of sky fire showed followed by a roar of thunder, then rain. It was not long until it was raining and pouring water like coming out of a [?] kettle and the fire was flashing steadily. We could see the fire jumping over the horns of the cattle. The thunder was hitting close and hard, we knew that the critters were going to stomp pronto.

"I [chinned?] to Bogger, "We'll never hold these critters to-night".

"All we can do is try hard as hell. Have you got sand in 5 craw, you will need it tonight", he shot at me.

"Craw is full of sand. How about yours?" I came back at him.

"All set", he sez, "Kid we'll stay put". That was the last words spoken till day light, except our hollering, hooting and attempts to sing, done trying to stop these cattle, but it useless because those critters started and went likes bunch coming out of the back door of hell.

"My hoss was doubled sighted, that is he could look ahead with one eye and with the other for a sure footed spot, but it was of no use that night, because the night was so dark I could not see his outline a-sitting a-top of him.

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"I thought of the darkness and realized the danger of the gopher holes, bogs and other things that could cause a spill, but knew that to save the cattle I had to forget the spills and go to riding which we each did.

"We tried to get the lead, that was the set arrangement, the other riders were instructed to ride the flank. The darkness made it hard to tell where we were and those critters were traveling fast. By the flashes of fire, we could get a glimps of the herd occasionally. After my hoss had out run a jack rabbit for about two miles, I got to the head of the herd. Bogger Red came right behind me, by coincident, we arrived close together, but try as we may, we could not turn that herd. I kept traveling waiting for my hoss to began to turn, but it kept going ahead, that way I knew the hoss was unable to force the herd to turn. [?] Instead of the hoss being able to crowd the critters into a turn, so as to get the herd milling around 6 they were crowding him. Finally I felt the hoss turn and the next instant he went down and I was piched into the darkness. When I landed I found myself in water about knee deep. I could hear the music of the tramping feet and clashing horns passing by. I knew that I was safe where I was and stood there until the herd passed.

"I waddled out after the herd had gone by and was standing still trying to get my conk to work out where I was and what direction to travel, as the dog house was the only place for me to drag to then. While standing there waiting for my conk to produce some idea, I felt something nudge my back and there stood my hoss Jerry. What had happened was while running Jerry came to a slough and vered, but not in time to keep out of the muck. Hitting the muck, caused him to stumble. I went into a spill landing about 15 feet to the right and that put me out of the way of the herd. That saved my from being branded for the eternal range.

"Well, when I got my hoss that changed my plans and we started after the herd. I did not know which way to go, but he did and in about an hour we caught up with it. I could not locate any of the other riders till day-light and the herd was scattered in all directions.

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"We spent a week hunting strays. One bunch got into the [?] and with those we had a time. [O;d?] Old man Cathey and I pulled out 70 and the others did about the same.

"I a going to tell what happned to me the last day we were working pulling those critters out of the rough. I 7 was cutting out a obstinate old cow and had wasted several loops on her by / reasons of the brush being in the way. I finally got a loop on her and just as she topped/ a hill, my pony set himself to throw her, but she had the down hill pull, so down went the pony and I, and we were dragged about 75 feet. My face looked like a map of the Chicago railroad yards. That cow taught me to never loop a critter while she was on a down hill drag.

"While on the subject of stampedes I will tell one on Bogger Red and it will also show how easily a stampede can be started. It was a cool day following a rain spell. Bogger was sleeping next to where the cattle were bedded down, with his slicker for a covering. I had on a pair of new boots. I was proud of the pair because they had brass toe tips- some swell boots- they had became muddy so I decided to clean off the grime and started [to scrape?] off the mud. The noise I made as I scraped the sole of the boot over a wire, scared the herd and away they went, right toward Red. He jumped up and waved the slicker while edging out of the way. He succeeded in getting out of their way, but was a riled human. If he had been minus his slicked he would have been stomped in good shape.

"The good times we had were in line with our work. It was playing pranks and some of them were hard. When a new hand came to work, he had to take the works, especially if he was a greener. A fellow named McGill came to our outfit and we tried to rib him several ways, but he was not a greener and 8 on to us buckaroos. He was a cocky fellow and chined a lot about his riding powers. In fact, he was some sticker on a hoss. We over worked our conks trying/ to calculate some means to pull a few feathers out of his tail. Bogger Red gave birth to a scheme [that?] hit McGill [in his?] soft spot. Bogger sez to him,

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"Mack, you chin about your riding powers, why we have a kid here, "meaning me," that can out ride you on a steer".

"I'll ride [against?] the kid, or any other rawhide under any proposition layed down", Red sez and swelled up like a boil.

"That was right in Red's mittens. We had a tough and snaky mulley steer, so that was the critter he and I were to ride. McGill was to ride him first and then I was to best his time. It was all agreed and the gang located the steer, looped and tied the critter. McGill was busy with the bunch getting the steer downed and tied and while he was engaged I led his hoss off about 200 yards.

"That steer was furiated, of course, and when a wild steer gets rilled a man has no pumpkins being on foot near it. Well, they got the critter all shaped up for McGill and he straddled the snake. The boys then untied the animal and made for their hosses. That steer made about two elevations with some wiggles and McGill took a spill. He jumped to his feet and dashed for his hoss, but the hoss was not there. However, the critter was and butted Mack in the back and down went McGill. When a critter puts a man down the thing to do 9 is lie perfectly still and the critter will not do any harm. Well, Mack looked around for his hoss and spied it off a piece, so he jumped up quickly and started a run for the hoss, but [?h} the steer was on the job and befor McGill made 20 feet the critter introduced himself again and down goes McGill. He made another try and did not do any better, he received another bump. That time McGill began to yowl for his hoss. We took [?] pity on him, so drove his hoss to him and rode betwex him and the animal to give him a chance to mount.

"That animal was lathering at the mouth and everytime he hit Mack a gob of lather would land on McGill back. When he hopped his hoss he looked like a frosty morning in the rear and a muddy road in the front. Of course we all knew a person may as well try to scratch his ear with his elbow as to try and ride that steer..

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"I have [?] thought of Bogger Red, after he became a noted rodeo performer, and recall when he loined joined my father's outfit. We pulled the snak blood hoos on him and he took it to entertain the op'ra house, that is the gang sitting on the top rail of the corral. [?] There was a pig pen next to the corral and as sloppy as a pig pen usally is. He took his spill and landed in the slop. He was no [four?] aces in looks coming up out of that slop.

"Of course most sections of the country had the pest known as the cattle rustler. In Bell County, the cowmen had adopted a resonable method of dealing with the brand blotters. The first time a blotter was caught he was warned and given 10 another chance after promising to stop blotting. If caoght caught the second time he was invited to jingle out of the counrty country then if caught again there always was a hemp party. Ther There were hemp parties, occasionally, in [?].

"I was at two cutting down parties. One of the parties tied a fellow named Smith and the other a fellow named Owens. They just failed to make the drag soon enough after the receiving the jigging orders. I never was present at a hemp party so can't tell of the proceedings.

"Our recreation was going to town pay days and to church once a month. Each trip call for a 20 mile ride. The sky pilot made the section once each month. I think the boys went for the purpose of getting an eye full of the few dals gals that attended. Women folks were scarce as hen teeth and the rawhides would jiggle a long way to go Sally-hooten.

"Belton was the nearest town and was 20 miles off. Every pay day the hands would make for Belton and come back gaunt as a gutted snow bird and looking frazzled, but would tell of the howling [good?] time they had.

"I was too young to mix in the sprees. In fact, Dad put his foot down against it. I reckoned I could waite until I was 21.

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"About the cattle drive, I made two to the Red River. There we turned them over to the buyer. Father always tried to sell to a buyer that would take the cattle at Red River. On the two drives we made we had no unusual trouble, we had a couple of stampedes, but lost no cattle. 11 "The cowhand's food was good common chuck and in the amount he wanted, plenty of meat, both of beef and deer. There were lots of deer in our section and we could have one anytime one of use cared to go out and shoot it. Of course the beef was secured off the reange, we would go out and pick out a fat young yearling.

"I want to tell of an idea that existed among the cowmen. It seemed that beef had a better flavor and was more tender if it did not contain the home brand. It was considered poor taste to kill anything, for eating purpose, except those with a strange brand.

"Our cook was a good one he could do wonders with chuck and when he yelled, "wash up snakes and come to the trough", they boys would hoof it for their sourdough and whistle berries.

"I have been wanting to twll talk about my hoss Jerry, but kept getting off on some other subject. You recall I told about him nudging me the night of the big stampede. Well a cow pony usually was hard to catch, but Jerry was different. He and I grew up together. He was a stripling with me and I trained him from a colt. His sire was a wild stallion that father ceased. Ceasing is capturing a hoss by shooting it at the top of the neck just deep enough to num the spinal cord. If an animal cant be approached close enough to be roped ceasing is the method use to down it. He was as pretty as a heart [?]. In fact, a perfect hoss if there ever was one. Jerry's mother was of Steeldust racing stock. So Jerry had speed and endurance. He could run all day and was sure 12 footed. That hoss would/ not buck with me, but let any other person straddle him and he became two boxes of rattle snakes turned loose. Working cows with Jerry was nothing more than leading him to the critter and from then on he did the work. That hoss seemed to enjoy biting a mean critter. I could just sit in the rocking chair pull a leaf out of the bible and roll a new lease on life out of my Bull

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Durham, while he was cutting a critter out of a herd.. Now, talk about pegging, that hoss would turn like a top and on the same amount of ground.

"I quit the range when I was 20 years old. I was a young man and Jerry was getting, hoss, old. He was about 15 and getting slow, but still going. It was like— well, losing an arm-to part with him. For weeks afterwards I was as lonesome as a preacher on pay nights.

"I went to Mississippi and engaged in work constructing the river levee and from that to railroad construction.

"I retired in 1927, and have taken it easy simce.

"I married Dorthy Mae Moore in 1897. I came to Fort Worth in 1917, and have made the city my home [?] since. We reared seven children and they are scattered all over the United States, so my wife and I are alnoe.